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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the results of research conducted on the variation in structure and function of institutional research offices at 55 public and private postsecondary educational institutions in Georgia. The study examined five issues central to institutional research: (1) professional role identity, (2) location of the office in the organizational hierarchy, (3) institutional research task variables, (4) the hierarchy of institutional research tasks, and (5) the role of the institutional research office in organized assessment activities. Findings are detailed in text and tables for each of these five issues. Among general findings are the following: the larger the institution's size, the larger the institutional research office staff; the lack of predictability between variables of institutional research structure and tasks is ascribed to the strong influence of varying management styles, demeanor, career paths, and organizational power structure; there was little relationship between organizational variables and the tasks hierarchy; the size of the professional staff suggested more about the nature of institutional research activities than any other single variable. The increasing importance of institutional research in smaller, two-year, and community colleges is noted. Contains 16 references. (DB)

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An Examination of Institutional Research Functions and Structures in Georgia Higher Education

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An Examination of Institutional Research Functions
and Structures in Georgia Higher Education

Abstract

This paper describes the results of research conducted on the variation in structure and function of institutional research offices at 81 public and private post-secondary educational institutions in the state of Georgia. Based upon Volkwein's (1989) earlier examination of NEAIR member institutions, this research examines five issues central to institutional research: professional role identity, location of the office in the organizational hierarchy, institutional research task variables, the hierarchy of institutional research tasks, and the role of the institutional research office in organized assessment activities.

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INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH FUNCTIONS AND STRUCTURES

Institutional research in American higher education faces a number of distinct and major issues. According to Volkwein and Agrotes (1989), four prominent concerns have emerged. First, institutional research officers suffer from ambiguity of professional identity. Seybert (1991), Peterson (1985), and Saupe (1981) have cited the somewhat brief history and incomplete evolution of institutional research as a distinct and acknowledged profession. The second issue facing institutional research is the extent to which institutional research activities are, or should be, organizationally centralized or decentralized. Much attention has been brought to the delineation and separation of the institutional research **office** and the institutional research **function** (Peterson and Corcoran, 1989; Middaugh, 1984). The proliferation of the institutional research function campuswide has been recognized as central to ensuring broad based participation in the assessment of institutional effectiveness (Rogers and Gentemann, 1989; Hearn and Corcoran, 1988).

A third issue pertains to the location of the institutional research office within the organizational structure and the breadth and depth of the institutional research function. The location of the institutional research office in the organizational structure affects its ability to function effectively, influences the nature of institutional research activities undertaken, and determines the importance and impact of institutional research on the institution's decision support system (Taylor, 1990; Clagett and Huntington, 1990; and Saupe 1989).

A final consideration involves the extent to which institutional research offices are or should be involved in assessing student learning outcomes and institutional effectiveness. Nichols and Wolfe (1990) and Moore (1988) argue that institutional research should play a significant role in institutional effectiveness and outcomes assessment implementation. However, Volkwein et al. discovered little participation by institutional research offices due to constraints in staff size and resources.

From these issues, five important aspects concerning institutional research have emerged: professional role identity, location of the institutional research office in the organizational hierarchical structure, the variety of institutional research task variables and their hierarchical importance, and the role of the institutional research office in organized assessment activities.

METHODOLOGY

The results of our survey research provide a profile of institutional research structures and functions in Georgia higher education. Using the 1994 edition of *Peterson's Guide to Higher Education* and the membership roster of the Administrative Committee of the University System of Georgia on Institutional Research and Planning, we sent surveys to 81 public and private campuses in Georgia during early June 1993. For purposes of our study we chose to exclude private proprietary schools and vocational institutions. Fifty-nine institutions responded for a return rate of 73%. Four of the responding institutions had no formal organizational structure called 'institutional research' or staff with a related job title. These institutions were excluded from our investigation. The institutional classifications of responding institutions were representative of all colleges

and universities in the state, with a larger representation of private two-year and public four-year colleges.

To collect the requisite data, we administered a modified version of the survey instrument developed by Volkwein et al. for their 1989 study of NEAIR institutions. The survey elicited data pertaining to staff size, educational preparation of institutional research staff, and years of institutional research experience. Information was requested on the location of the institutional research office in the organizational structure and the individual to whom the chief institutional research officer is ultimately responsible. Respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which certain institutional research related functional tasks are centralized on their individual campuses. Institutions were categorized by size (FTE enrollment) and Carnegie Classification.

Descriptive statistics include staff size and educational attainment, academic field of highest degree, and years of institutional research experience. Examined also is the location of the institutional research office in the organizational hierarchy by campus size and classification. We examined the tasks conducted by institutional research offices by campus type and office location, the variety of special initiatives and projects by type and classification, and examined assessment activities by type of assessment activity and centrality of assessment control.

We listed nearly forty functional tasks and requested responses to a six point scale:

Not Applicable	Centralized		Decentralized		
to this Institution	I.R. office	One other office	2 offices incl. IR	exc. IR	dispersed among 3+ offices
1	2	3	4	5	6

In part, our research attempted to answer the following questions: "What is the impact of professional identity on one's effectiveness in discharging their institutional research duties?"; "What is the impact of the centralization/decentralization of the institutional research function on institutional research effectiveness?"; and "What is the impact of the location of the institutional research office in the organizational hierarchy on institutional research effectiveness?".

We attempted to resolve the collective identity crises among institutional researchers in the State by answering the questions: "Who am I"; "What do I do"; "How important am I to my institution?"; and "How is my situation here similar/dissimilar to my colleagues around the state?".

We developed a profile of institutional research offices by Carnegie Classification, which may have implications for comparison with other state university systems and institutional research affiliated groups. The data from our study is compared to that of Volkwein, Agrotes, and Hannahs (1989) to determine similarity of responses between survey populations.

PROFESSIONAL VARIABLES

Table 1 displays a profile of professional staff in the 55 institutions responding to the survey. Nearly three-fourths of professional institutional research staff have earned at least a masters degree, with 37% holding the doctorate. Professional institutional research staff earned their highest degree in the following academic disciplines: 30% in Mathematics or Science, 24% in Education, 17% in Social Science, 17% in Business, and nearly 12% in a Humanities related discipline.

TABLE 1

Description of Professional Staff in Institutional Research Offices in Georgia
(N=92)

Highest Degree

Doctorate	36.9 %
Masters	34.5 %

Academic Field of Highest Degree

Mathematics/Science	29.9 %
Education	24.2 %
Social Science	17.2 %
Business	17.2 %
Humanities	11.5 %

Years of Experience in Institutional Research

0 - 2	27.4 %
3 - 5	30.5 %
6 - 9	15.9 %
10 - 15	12.2 %
16 +	14.0 %

Nearly three-fifths of the professional staff have been in institutional research less than five years, however more than 25% of the respondents indicated that they had been active in the profession for more than 10 years. Fourteen percent had been working in institutional research for more than 16 years.

All sizes and types of institutions were represented in the responses to the survey. Public and Private institutions were evenly represented, as were two and four-year

colleges, and universities. The majority of our respondents were employed by private four-year colleges (27.3%), followed by public four-year colleges (23.6%), and public two-year institutions (21.8%). Additionally, 14.8% of the respondents were employed in either a public or private university.

Table 2 displays all institutional research office personnel; professional, clerical, graduate students, and student workers. A total of 176 individuals were employed in the 55 institutions responding. Fifty-two percent of those individuals staffing institutional research offices are full or part-time professionals. Clerical staff account for 26% of institutional research office personnel, and 22% are comprised of graduate assistants and part-time work study students. Of the 176 institutional research personnel, 65% were staffed full-time in institutional research. The remaining 35% of institutional research staff were charged with other college administrative and administrative support responsibilities such as planning, student records, admissions and financial aid, student registration, and overseeing the administrative affairs of computer services. Among professional staff, 77% are devoted full-time to carrying out institutional research responsibilities. Nearly four-fifths of the clerical staff are employed full-time in support of institutional research.

Twenty-seven percent of the respondents indicated that their institutional research office was staffed by a total of three to five personnel. More than three-fifths of the offices were staffed by one or two personnel. Institutional research offices with more than six personnel accounted for 9% of the respondents.

TABLE 2

Description of Institutional Research Office Staff
(N = 176)

	Full-Time #	Full-Time %	Part-Time #	Part-Time %
Professional	71	40.3	21	11.9
Clerical	35	19.9	11	6.4
Graduate Assts	0	0.0	3	1.7
Work Study	8	4.5	27	15.3

Institutional Research Office
Institutional Classification
(N = 55)

	Private #	Private %	Public #	Public %	Total #	Total %
University	4	7.3	4	7.3	8	14.5
4 Year College	15	27.3	13	23.6	28	50.9
2 Year College	7	12.7	12	21.8	19	34.8
Total	26	47.3	29	52.7	55	100.0

Table 3 displays the staffing patterns within the 55 Georgia institutional research offices examined. Sixty-eight percent of these offices have only one full-time professional and more than four-fifths have two or fewer full-time professionals. Fifteen percent of the institutions have an institutional research office staffed with only a part-time professional, and less than one-in-four have more than two part-time professional staffers. Nearly half of the respondents indicated that they employed at least one graduate assistant or work study student.

TABLE 3

Staffing Patterns of Institutional Research Offices in Georgia
(N = 55)

	% of Offices with # of Staff:			
	0	1	2	>3
Full-time Professional	15	68	8	9
Part-time Professional	75	19	4	2
Full-time Clerical	25	59	10	6
Part-time Clerical	69	28	3	-
Graduate Assistants	57	29	14	-
Work Study Students	49	23	17	11

Organizational Variables

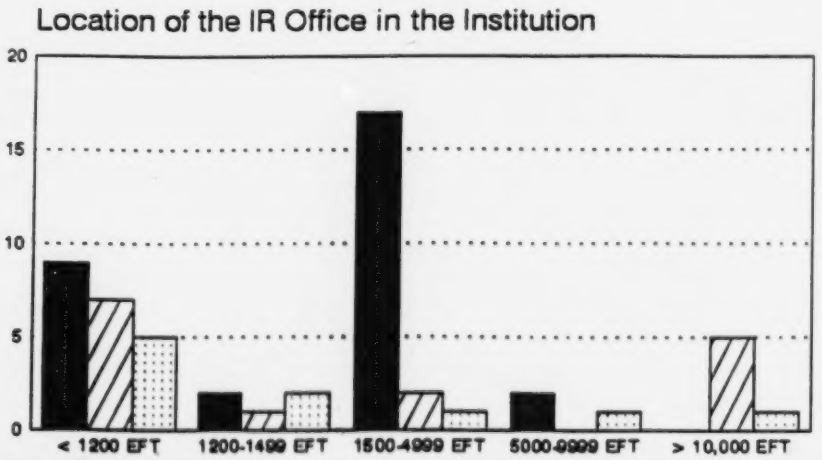
Table 4 illustrates the administrative level and administrative area of the institutional research office by campus size. Administrative **level** refers to whom the Director (or equivalent title) reports. At smaller campuses (less than 1200 EFT) the majority of institutional research offices report to a Vice Chancellor or Vice President. As institutions increase in size, the chief institutional research officer reports to the institutions President, with the exception of institutions with 10,000 or more EFT, whose institutional research officer reports to a Vice President or Vice Chancellor. Sixty-Seven percent of the institutions which place institutional research at levels below a Vice President or Vice Chancellor are 4 year colleges. Among Universities, 100% of the respondents reported to a Vice President or Vice Chancellor. The majority (86%) were either Vice President or Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. Forty-one percent of the respondents from 4-year schools reported to a Vice President/Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Business and Finance, and other administrative areas such as Institutional Advancement, Legal Affairs,

and Planning and Information Technology. Thirty-eight percent of these respondents reported directly to the institutions president. In 2-year institutions, 58% of the respondents reported directly to the President, with 26% reporting to a Vice President/Chancellor for Academic Affairs.

Administrative **Division** refers to the functional location of institutional research within the organizational hierarchy. Fifty-three percent of the respondents (29 campuses) reported the institutional research function to be housed within the executive division, particularly in 4-year colleges. The second most common location finds institutional research housed within the production subsystem of academic affairs. The remaining campuses indicated institutional research's location to be in other support and technical subsystems such as business and finance, student services, or the campus computer center. Based upon the literature and Volkwein's (1989) earlier study, we anticipated larger, more professionally experienced staffs in larger, more diverse institutions. Correlations among organizational and professional variables used in our study confirmed this alternative hypothesis to a certain extent. As illustrated in Table 5, institutional research staff size is highly correlated with campus size (.81) and Carnegie Classification (.50). These in turn are significantly correlated with years of experience, and strongly associated with highest academic degree earned. Our analysis revealed little significant correlation between professional variables and the location of the institutional research office within the institution. However, the data suggest that the larger the size of the institutional research staff, the greater the likelihood that the unit would be housed in the executive level (President) of the institution. Furthermore, there may be a weaker, yet linear relationship between location and years experience and highest degree earned.

TABLE 4

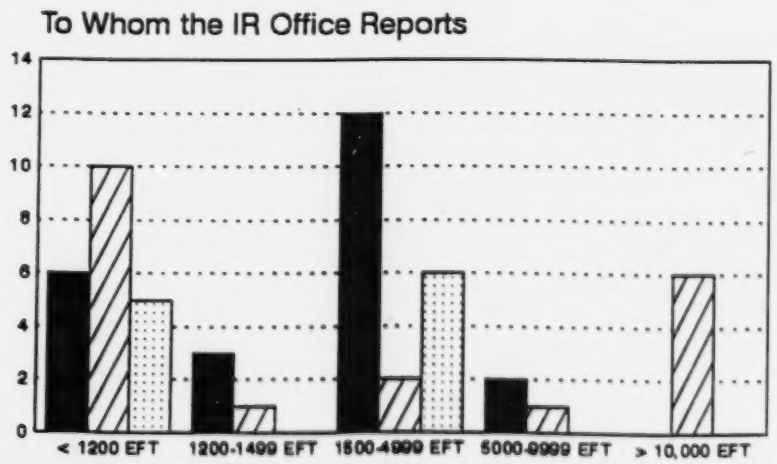
Organizational Location of Institutional Research Offices
Size by Administrative Division



	< 1200 EFT	1200-1499 EFT	1500-4999 EFT	5000-9999 EFT	> 10,000 EFT
President	9	2	17	2	0
Acad. Affrs.	7	1	2	0	5
Other	5	2	1	1	1

Number of Institutions

Organizational Location of Institutional Research Offices
Size by Administrative Level



	< 1200 EFT	1200-1499 EFT	1500-4999 EFT	5000-9999 EFT	> 10,000 EFT
President	6	3	12	2	0
Vice President	10	1	2	1	6
Below VP	5	0	6	0	0

Number of Institutions

TABLE 5

Correlations Among the Organizational and Professional Variables Used in the Study
(N = 55)

	Professional Variables		
Organizational Variables	Staff Size	Years Highest Experience	Degree
Campus Size	.81*	.31*	.22
Carnegie Classification	.50*	.35*	- .26
Functional Location of Institutional Research	.03	.06	- .12

* significant at $p < .05$

Task Variables

Table 6 lists frequent tasks conducted by institutional research offices in the state. The first column illustrates the percentage of institutions which centralize these tasks in the institutional research office. The second column displays the percent that these tasks are shared among other offices. The third column displays the percentage of tasks not carried out by institutional research offices.

More than 60% of institutional research offices assume central responsibility in undertaking the first twelve tasks. Ranking especially highly are complying to National Survey Data, Affirmative Action Reports, producing the Campus Factbook, and completing College guidebook surveys. Tasks which seldom demand a great deal of institutional research resources are studies of research funding, survey research on campuswide issues, and self-study for accreditation purposes. Tasks identified by a number of respondents as requiring no institutional research involvement included the production of the Campus Factbook, conducting economic impact studies, and directing salary studies and reviews.

TABLE 6

Frequent Centralized Tasks Carried Out
By Georgia Institutional Research Offices
(N = 55)

	Percent Campus Response		
	Centralized	Shared	No IR Involvement
National Survey Data	78	22	0
Affirmative Action Reports	71	27	2
Campus FactBook Production	68	11	21
College Guidebook Surveys	69	24	7
Reporting Other Student Data	67	31	2
Degrees Awarded Statistics	66	35	0
Attrition/Retention Studies	66	35	0
Enrollment Data Analysis	64	35	2
Institutional Data Exchange	63	35	2
Faculty Workload Analysis	62	38	0
Summary Stats/Student Evaluations	60	34	6
Space Allocation Analysis	60	35	5
Resource Development Statistics	60	31	9
Budget/Cost/Resource Reallocation Stds	58	38	4
Revenue Data/Projections	56	43	0
Reporting Admissions Indicators	56	40	4
Salary Studies	55	35	10
Enrollment Projections	55	46	0
Personnel Statistics/Summaries	55	46	0
Prepare Campus Planning Documents	52	44	4
Enrollment Management Studies	51	46	4
Student Opinion Surveys	51	49	0
Academic Performance Appraisals	50	50	0
State Requests for Data	50	33	17
Environmental Boundary Scanning	48	44	7
Alumni Studies	44	51	5
Measurement of Basic Skills	43	50	7
Prepare Campus Budget Request	40	59	2
Central Office Requests	39	43	8
Economic Impact Studies	39	35	26
Academic Program Reviews	35	64	2
Measurement of Personal/Social Growth	33	56	1
Measurement of General Education	32	61	7
Measurement of Achievement	32	63	6
Self-Study for Accreditation Purposes	31	67	2
Survey Research on Campuswide Issues	29	60	1
Research Funding Studies	24	20	56

In this particular section of the study, we were interested in determining which institutional research tasks were undertaken in cooperation and consultation with other campus offices. As displayed in Table 7, respondents identified ten tasks that are frequently carried out by at least two other offices, including or excluding institutional research. Institutional research activities involving an institutions self-study for purpose of accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation was reported to be the task most widely shared with other campus offices. Academic program reviews, and projects surrounding the measurement of student achievement and general education were also listed as being 'decentralized' institutional research activities.

Another area of interest to us was the nature of special and ad hoc studies and initiatives conducted by institutional research offices. Table 8 displays the number of campuses reporting institutional research involvement in all of the special studies listed on our survey instrument and those added by the respondents. Georgia institutional research offices reported a high level of involvement in special studies related to attrition and retention, admissions and enrollment management studies, and research involving the academic performance of students.

TABLE 7

10 Most Frequent Tasks Carried Out
By Georgia Institutional Research Offices
With At Least One Other Office
(N = 55)

	Percent Campus Response		
	Centralized	Shared	No IR Involvement
Self-Study for Accreditation Purposes	31	67	2
Academic Program Reviews	35	63	2
Measurement of Achievement	32	62	6
Measurement of General Education	32	61	7
Survey Research on Campuswide Issues	29	60	11
Prepare Campus Budget Request	40	58	2
Measurement of Personal/Social Growth	33	56	11
Alumni Studies	44	51	5
Academic Performance Appraisals	50	50	0
Measurement of Basic Skills	43	50	7

TABLE 8

Special Initiatives and Studies Reported
By Georgia Institutional Research Offices
(N = 55)

Type of Initiative/Study	# Campuses	% Respondents
Attrition/Retention	55	100
Admissions/Enrollment Management	53	96
Student Academic Performance	53	96
Miscellaneous Budget/Finance Issues	53	96
Alumni Studies	52	95
Miscellaneous Campus Issues	51	93
Assessment of Educational Outcomes	50	91
Student Opinion Surveys	49	89
Accreditation Self-Studies	49	89
Miscellaneous Student Affairs Issues	48	87
Miscellaneous Academic Issues	41	75
Academic Program Reviews	37	67

Assessment

To facilitate easier identification of campus and institutional research involvement in assessment activities, we followed a structural framework used by Volkwein and Argotes (1990), which was based, in part, on earlier work by Jacobi, Astin, and Ayala (1987). Assessment activities were divided into four distinct categories: basic skills, general education, attainment in the major, and personal and social growth. Table 9 displays for each assessment category the percentage of respondents reporting no campus assessment activity, assessment centralized with the institutional research unit, assessment activities undertaken by institutional research in cooperation with one other campus office, and assessment activities which are institutionally decentralized or dispersed among many separate offices.

Institutions of higher education in Georgia are very involved in assessment activities. Eighty-five percent of the respondents indicated on-going assessment activities in all four assessment areas. The data reveal that assessment activities relating to student attainment in the major is the most common assessment undertaking, being conducted by 93% of the respondents. Even among two-year institutions, only 11% reported no assessment of student attainment in the major. Although highly decentralized, 91% of the respondents indicated institutional involvement in the assessment of general education and basic skills. Measuring the non cognitive personal and social growth of student is the least common statewide assessment activity. Fifteen percent of all respondents and 25 percent of the universities indicate no involvement in the assessment of personal and social growth.

We further examined institutional responses to assessment activities to determine variances among institutional type and the organizational location of the institutional research office. Although organizational location made no significant difference in the patterns of response, we identified some interesting contrasts between institutional types. In three of the four assessment categories (basic skills, general education, and personal and social growth), universities reported the least amount of assessment activity. However, 100 percent of universities reported involvement in assessment activities pertaining to attainment in the academic major. In contrast, two-year colleges reported the most assessment activity in two categories (basic skills and general education) and in three of the four categories (general education, attainment in the major, and personal and social growth) as the most centralized involvement by the institutional research office.

Data in Table 9 suggest that assessment is a high priority in Georgia higher education. Assessments are conducted universally, and the activities are somewhat centralized. Roughly one-third of the respondents indicated that assessment endeavors are undertaken solely by the institutional research office or in cooperation with one other campus unit. Assessment activities conducted within two-year institutions are most highly centralized, whereas those conducted within universities are the most highly decentralized. Overall, more than four-fifths of responding institutions are engaged in some type of outcomes assessment.

TABLE 9

Participation in Assessment
Activities by Georgia Colleges and Universities

Type of Assessment	Locus of Assessment	Percentage for All Institutions	Range of Percents by Type of Institution	
			Lowest	Highest
Basic Skills	No assessment	9	Two-year = 0	University = 25
	IR role	10	University = 0	Four-year = 11
	One other office	36	University = 13	Two-year = 37
	Decentralized	45	Four-year = 47	University = 63
General Education	No assessment	9	Two-year = 5	University = 13
	IR role	7	University = 0	Two-year = 16
	One other office	24	Two-year = 21	Four-year/Univ. = 25
	Decentralized	60	Two-year = 58	University = 63
Attainment in Major	No assessment	7	University = 0	Two-year = 11
	IR role	6	University = 0	Two-year = 5
	One other office	27	University = 25	Four-year = 32
	Decentralized	60	Two-year = 53	University = 75
Personal/social	No assessment	15	Four-year = 7	University = 25
	IR role	11	University = 0	Two-year = 16
	One other office	20	University = 13	Four-year = 21
	Decentralized	54	Two-year = 47	University = 63

Characteristics and Tasks by Division

We examined the tasks which most closely support the institutions executive function (under the President) and the Academic Affairs function. Since more than 80% of our respondents indicated that their institutional research unit was located in either the executive or academic affairs units, we devoted particular attention to the characteristics and tasks associated with institutional research within these two divisions.

Fifty-four percent of the respondents indicated that the institutional research unit on their campuses are housed in the executive division (President/Chancellor) of the institution, were four year institutions and had EFT student enrollments of 1,500 to 4,999. No institution with an EFT student enrollment above 8,000 housed institutional research

in the executive division. The majority of the offices were staffed by one full-time professional. One in four offices additionally employed a part-time institutional research professional. These offices were staffed with clerical support sufficient to carry out their tasks. 54% of the professional institutional research staff housed in the executive division had earned a terminal degree and have less than five years institutional research experience.

Georgia institutional research offices housed in the executive division where more likely to have a significantly greater degree of centralized control in the tasks of preparing the campus budget request, preparing planning documents, collecting resources development statistics, complying with University System of Georgia Central Office requests, preparing the Campus Factbook, Attrition and Retention studies, and completing College guidebook surveys than those reporting to the chief academic affairs officer.

Institutional research offices housed in the academic affairs subsystem maintain centralized control in collecting national survey data, faculty workload analyses, measurement of basic skills and other measures of educational outcomes, and in conducting studies of alumni. The majority of institutional research offices housed in academic affairs are in 4 year institutions with EFT enrollments of 1200 or less. Thirty-one percent of the respondents indicating that their offices were in the academic affairs area were from institutions with student EFT in excess of 10,000. Two-thirds of the respondents indicated that their offices were staffed by one full-time institutional research professional. All indicated sufficient clerical support. however institutional research offices

under academic affairs were more likely to employ part-time clerical staff. Sixty percent of the professional institutional research staff under the academic affairs area had earned either a Ph.D. or Ed.D.. More than half had been employed in institutional research 5-7 years.

Hierarchy of Tasks

As part of our analysis, we attempted to make determinations pertaining to the difficulty and complexity of each of the tasks identified on the questionnaire and others identified by the respondents. For example, the degree of expertise and training required to report enrollment data was judged to be less difficult and demanding than developing enrollment and revenue projections. Similar judgements were made in regards to the other listed tasks which were grouped into three categories: high, medium, and low. In general, assessment activities, survey research, and other institutional research tasks requiring expertise in research methods and statistics were determined to be at the highest of the three levels. At the lower end of the scale were more traditional institutional research tasks such as responding to surveys, producing the Campus Factbook, and reporting student characteristics.

Based on the organizational and professional literature, we expected to find this task hierarchy to be significantly related both to organizational and professional variables. Are larger institutional research offices and more highly trained and experienced staffs more likely to assume higher level responsibilities?

The results are displayed in Table 10. The task hierarchy is most significantly correlated with Carnegie Classification, campus size, and size of professional staff. The

functional location of the institutional research office and the highest degree earned by professional staff are not significantly related to the Task Hierarchy. These results, in part, support our alternative hypothesis that more complex tasks are conducted by larger staffs, at larger institutions. However, contrary to our expectations, professional variables appear to have less influence on the difficulty and complexity of tasks carried out the institutional research offices, than do organizational variables.

TABLE 10

Correlations Between the Task Hierarchy
and the Professional and Organizational Variables
Examined in the Study

	Correlation with Task Hierarchy
Carnegie Classification	.33*
FTE Enrollment	.29*
Professional Staff Size	.27*
Years of Experience	.22
Administrative Location: Level	- .07
Highest Degree Earned	- .04

* significant at $p < .05$

Discussion

The results of our examination of the functions and structures of institutional research offices in Georgia produced findings that are generally consistent with our expectations and the earlier work by Volkwein, Agrotes, and Hannahs (1989). The larger the institutions size, the larger the institutional research office staff. Larger offices are found to employ more highly trained and experienced staffs, and tend to carry out a more complex assortment of tasks, with the expectation of outcomes assessment. Our data indicate that institutional research offices in Georgia are very involved in student learning outcomes and assessment activities.

Although the strength of relationships between select variables in this study are reflective of those identified in the literature, they are not strongly correlated to the degree that accurate predictions can be made regarding the situation on a given campus. The lack of predictability is attributable, in part, to the broad diversity of organizational locations, functions, and tasks undertaken by institutional research offices in the state. While there is a set of tasks commonly shared among institutional research offices, there exists much variation in the degree to which these tasks are centralized on individual institutions. This variance is most likely attributable to the variance in the location of the institutional research office in the organizational hierarchy. In general, our findings are comparable to the supposition of Volkwein (1989) and Hearn and Corcoran (1988) that management styles, demeanor, career paths, and organizational power structure strongly influence the nature of institutional research structures and tasks.

In partial fulfillment of our study, we sought to identify relationship between organizational and professional variables and the task hierarchy. Our data indicate little relationship between organizational variables and the task hierarchy. However, the size of the professional staff suggested more about the nature of institutional research activities undertaken within the institution that any other single variable.

There were a number of limitations to our data which were likely to severely reduce the variance between institutions. First, only 9 of the 55 institutions (16 percent) have enrollments exceeding 5,000 EFT. The absence of larger institutions undoubtedly reduced the variability of responses. Another factor contributing to the reduction in variance is the array of approximately ten institutional research activities that are carried

out in nearly all institutions within the state. Regardless of the administrative level or division, institutional research staff compile data and provide information both internally and externally to the institution and are intensely involved in student and faculty studies.

Another factor limiting the variance between institutions related to student learning outcomes and assessment activities. The task hierarchy rankings weighted assessment activities more heavily than other institutional research activities, yet a higher proportion of participation in assessment and assessment-related activities is found in two-year colleges, and is vastly decentralized or non-existent in universities. Furthermore, the smaller the institution, the more centralized the assessment activities, and therefore the greater the extent of institutional research involvement, despite the number and experience of institutional research staff. This particular finding is perhaps the most profound of our study.

The validity of responses is dependent on the degree to which respondents accurately and fully answered the survey items reflecting their office, its personnel, and its activities. The instrument was constructed with the intent of collecting meaningful data is an uncomplicated and easy manner. Although we collected ample data on the extent and specificity of institutional research structures and functions, we did not inquire into the degree to which offices were simply calculating descriptive statistics or applying conceptual frameworks, determining relationships among variables, or building scales and models. Another useful measure would have been to determine the technological skill of professional staff.

In general, our findings indicate a high degree of similarity between institutional research professionals in Georgia and those holding membership in NEAIR. The administrative arrangements and tasks of offices are as varied as the institutions in which the offices are found. The profession of Institutional Research continues to evolve. As the requirements for accurate and timely data and information in support of planning and assessment in higher education continue to increase, so too will the expectations of the institutional research office. Professional associations such as AIR and it's affiliated groups, Society of College and University Planners, and others continue to provide avenues for professional development and networking, especially for professionals in large comprehensive and research institutions. However, more and greater responsibilities are being placed on the shoulders of institutional research professionals in smaller, two-year and community colleges. Institutional research as a profession should increase its attention to serving the very real and increasing needs of this segment of the profession. As Volkwein concludes, the effectiveness and efficiency of the institutional research profession can only be improved by recognizing the wide diversity of structures and tasks that characterize campus institutional research practice and be designing the kinds of collaborative support structures that are consistent with such diversity.

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